

# Niagara County Tribune/Sentinel

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## RIVER REGION BUSINESSES STILL STILL OPEN FOR BUSINESS

One year into pandemic, local merchants continue to build back

BY JOSHUA MALONI

GM/Managing Editor

A year ago this week, we published an article noting small businesses in the River Region would remain open, even as New York state went on "PAUSE" to slow the coronavirus spread.

Though doors were closed, some merchants and most restaurateurs would pivot from in-person to online, takeout and curbside transactions.

If we're being honest, the story was also meant to encourage locals to "shop small" – when possible – and it was somewhat of a defiant statement toward the mandate shuttering local entrepreneurs.

The initial thought was society would return to "normal" in two weeks.

But it was more than two months before those doors reopened.

Little did anyone know at that time, but crowd restrictions would remain in place for more than a year, as COVID-19 stubbornly lingered.

2020 was the year no one wanted – but, remarkably, it did provide valuable lessons (and new revenue streams) for local businesses.

The progress of local businesses during the pandemic – "New York State on PAUSE," the four phases of reopening, "New York Forward"

Believe it or not, some establishments actually did *better* than before the pandemic, despite myriad challenges and few events.

When Gov. Andrew Cuomo closed all nonessential businesses in March, Casa Antica owner/chef

Calogero Soldano said he was, "One hundred percent panicking."

"But we've been together for so long – we've been through ups and downs with that place after now 21 years being in the same location – that we kind of brain-

– has been chronicled in this newspaper and online over the past 12 months. It's been a challenging year, but owners are resilient.

stormed, put our minds together, and said, 'Listen, if we're gonna do this, let's do it the right way. We're going to take advantage of the curbside,' he said. "And we kind of pulled from my dad, from  
**SEE LOCAL, continued on Page 8**

## Canal Fest canceled again this year

BY MICHAEL DEPIETRO

Tribune Editor

Canal Fest of the Tonawandas 2021 has been officially canceled, North Tonawanda Mayor Arthur Pappas announced Tuesday. The event was scheduled for July 18-25.

During the city's Common Council work session, Pappas said the decision was made at a recent meeting with City of Tonawanda and North Tonawanda officials, including the mayors, fire chiefs, police chiefs and emergency personnel.

"It was unanimously decided that Canal Fest should not happen this year due to the (COVID-19) restrictions and the lateness of the plans and everything coming forward," Pappas said. "It didn't seem practical; it didn't seem like it was possible to do what the committee was recommending.



"Everyone's a little bit saddened by this, because everyone was looking forward to activities opening up this summer; but it seems like the logistics and what's involved with the alter-

nate plans – due to construction and so on in the downtown area – especially in the City of Tonawanda this year and the traffic flow – there were so many questions and constraints that it was unani-

mously decided that it should not be held this year."

The Tribune has reached out to Canal Fest of the Tonawandas Inc. for comment.

This is the second year the beloved, long-running festival has been canceled due to the coronavirus pandemic.

Created in 1983, Canal Fest has been a bilaterally coordinated festival, primarily located near Renaissance Bridge, which connects the neighboring cities along the Erie Canal. The festival was created with three goals: To promote downtown businesses on both sides of the canal; to raise funds for nonprofit organizations; and to provide the local communities with fun and recreation.

9-year-old  
'Jam Man'  
interviews  
the stars



"Jam Man" with musician Marky Ramone. (Photo credit: www.rockingwithJamMan.com)

BY MICHAEL DEPIETRO

Tribune Editor

It's probably safe to assume most 9-year-olds didn't spend their COVID-19 lockdown time interviewing Hollywood actors and rock stars.

That's because most 9-year-olds aren't as rad as Town of Niagara's Remzi "Jam Man" Yates III.

Since starting his own YouTube channel and website (www.rockingwithjamman.com) a mere five months ago, "Jam Man" has begun making quite the name for himself in the entertainment news world. His interviews have been picked up and reported on by numerous well-known outlets, including Blabbermouth, Loud Wire and Ultimate-Guitar.com.

While there's a novelty element in the idea of a 9-year-old talking to stars and celebs, "Jam Man" isn't a novelty act. His recent interview with Tony Todd, star of the "Candyman" horror film series, was reported-on by Cinemablend.com as Todd revealed some breaking news regarding Virginia Madsen's (protagonist of the first film) involvement in the upcoming reboot co-written by Jordan Peele ("Get Out").

**SEE JAM, continued on Page 20**

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